

General speaking principles

Competent speakers derive their proficiency by giving attention to a number of attributes.

The best way to become more proficient at these attributes is to concentrate on one at a time. Practise, and then concentrate on another attribute but don't become too preoccupied with only one aspect.

Purpose

All effective presentations have a clearly defined purpose, no matter what media is used. This is the first essential step for any preparation. Essential as it is, it is often overlooked! The clearly defined purpose can be easily tested for with the following question.

“What is my message in ten words or less?”

If you cannot answer this straight away and have to think about the question, then you have more work to do!

Ask, "What do I want to achieve?"

With speeches, they have one of four primary objects, ie to inform, persuade, entertain or motivate. The speech may also have one of these four attributes as a secondary feature. For example : to motivate to action using humour.

With a purpose clearly defined, identifying what material you will use and what to discard will be much easier.

A clearly defined purpose will also make mapping out the structure much easier to achieve!

Structure

This is probably one of the more difficult aspects of speaking to master because you already have the advantage of knowing what you're thinking, hence, making it hard to judge the level at which to pitch your speech.

This is very important to get right.

If your audience cannot follow your message, you are only wasting your time and the audience's time!

All speeches have an Opening, Body and Conclusion.

The Opening must catch the audience interest and flag what the speech is about.

The Body contains the information that you want to present.

This information should be linked with a theme otherwise it will be just a series of loosely related topics. Examples of a theme are Past, Present and Future. or times of a day or seasons etc.

If presenting an argument, don't just give a series of examples and expect the audience to follow the logic of your argument, they won't!

Be very selective about your material and avoid elaborate details unless supported with other aids.

The Conclusion must clearly reinforce what your speech was about and finish with reference to the Opening.

Remember, your audience must be given cues to guide them through your presentation.